

Needham Youth Services

Annual Town Report - Fiscal Year 2015

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Purpose

The mission of Needham Youth Services (formerly known as the Needham Youth Commission) is to provide leadership and a community focus on youth and family issues and to promote community wellness by: Identifying and addressing youth and family needs; Advocating for youth and family interests; Partnering with other youth and family serving agencies; Developing and implementing quality programs and services; and Educating and communicating with the public regarding youth and family issues.

Needham Youth Services operates as a mental health resource offering a wide array of confidential clinical and programmatic services to children, adolescents, and families. While the department's services are reaching more people and having a greater impact, it is clear that the need for such services far outweighs the department's resources; thus, many in Needham are not receiving support. Youth Services has worked diligently to construct meaningful services designed to meet the increasing and ever-changing needs of the Needham community. Learn more about Needham Youth Services at: www.needhamma.gov/youth.

Fiscal Year 2015 Highlights

Adoptive Parenting Program

In the past year the department launched a new initiative to support parents who have adopted children. The Adoptive Parent Group met for four weeks to discuss topics particular to their needs and challenges. Twenty parents registered for this program, and more information is available online at: www.needhamma.gov/youth/adoption.

VIP Program

In Fiscal Year 2015, the VIP (Valuable Interactions among Peers) Program enjoyed its fourth year of operation. VIP matched high school students with elementary school age youth who had a need for additional support in their lives. The program allowed high school “Big VIPs” the opportunity to be role models for a young person in our community. The program also allowed elementary school “Little VIPs” (youth in 3rd grade to 5th grade) the opportunity to form meaningful relationships with high school youth. In the past fiscal year, the program grew by 50%, and the feedback from participants was extremely positive (all participants completed an evaluation at the end of the year). In FY 2015, 341 hours of volunteers participated in VIP. Learn more about the VIP Program at www.needhamma.gov/youth/vip.

Bullying Intervention Program

Three years ago, Needham Youth Services created an innovative new effort entitled the Bullying Intervention Program (BIP). This 10 hour clinical program worked with “Aggressors” to assist them to better understand the laws, implications, and the impact of bullying. Referrals were accepted from the Needham Public Schools, private institutions, and from parents. All participants completed an evaluation at the conclusion of the program as well as another one after three and a final evaluation after six months to better gauge the impact of this program. In addition, Needham Youth Services collaborated with the Needham Public Schools on a pamphlet for parents on Bullying. Learn more about the Bullying Intervention Program and view the pamphlet for parents at www.needhamma.gov/youth/bip.

QPR Suicide Prevention Trainings (Question, Persuade, Refer): The QPR Suicide Prevention model was patterned after the success of the CPR (Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation) medical intervention and was based upon the concept that the person most likely to prevent an individual from dying by suicide is someone that person already knows (e.g. parent, teacher, relative, or friend). This program has been in operation for seven years, with each training two hours in length. QPR trainings were provided for professionals, parents, and for many community groups in Needham. Program participants completed an evaluation at the conclusion of each QPR. Learn more about QPR trainings at www.needhamma.gov/youth/qpr.

Community Crisis Response: Over the past decade, the Needham community has grappled with critical youth issues such as loss, self injury, depression, and anxiety. Youth Services has responded by outreaching to youth, parents, and families in a variety of ways including individual meetings, group sessions, and the distribution of informational materials. In addition, the department was actively involved with groups such as the Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention and the Needham Coalition for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention. In FY 2015, a significant number of staff hours were devoted to creating materials, meeting with community leaders, and to directly assisting youth and/or their parents with a crisis.

Safe Surf: Internet Safety for Middle School Youth and their Parents: Initially funded by the Needham Education Foundation, this long standing program provided 6th grade students and parents with the knowledge to navigate the Internet safely. Through workshops and written materials, students and parents learned about appropriate ways to use the Internet. In FY 2015, 369 youth participated in this program (as well as completed an evaluation of program). In addition, Safe Surf Informational Booklets were distributed to parents (booklets were funded by the Needham Exchange Club). Learn more about the Safe Surf Program at www.needhamma.gov/youth/safesurf.

A Conversation...For Parents of Teens: Sponsored by the Needham Women's Club, this program has been offered to Needham parents for close to a decade. Each session allowed a maximum of nine parents per meeting, and each focused upon a specific youth-related topic such as alcohol/drugs, suicide/loss, stress, anxiety, and depression. Over fifty parents participated in this program in the past fiscal year. Learn more about "A Conversation..." at www.needhamma.gov/youth/aconversation.

Website: The Youth Services website continued to grow in FY 2015 as residents learned about services, read the Needham Youth Services Annual Report, viewed pictures of the staff and programs, and used this site to gather information about programs and mental health matters. In an effort to inform youth and families of the programs and resources of Needham Youth Services, e-mail addresses from residents were accepted and information was sent regarding programs and services (to date, over 2,000 have registered for this service). Residents can register for this free service at www.needhamma.gov/youth/email. Special thanks to the Information Technology Department for their support in establishing this vibrant website. Please visit the Youth Services website at www.needhamma.gov/youth.

Individual/Family Counseling: The Masters level staff clinicians are skilled at working with youth and families who are experiencing difficulties with issues such as family discord, loss, drugs, alcohol, stress, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. Who used these counseling services? They were neighbors, cousins, children, and friends; they were people with no health insurance or expired health insurance; they were people grappling with either a short or long-term problem; but mostly, they were people who had the hope and determination that life can bring greater satisfaction and reward. It was not unusual to work with an elementary age youth coping with a significant loss, a middle school student coping with parental alcohol use, or a high school student with a drug problem. The majority of referrals were for family issues, and the schools were the largest sources of referrals. In the past year 801 hours of counseling were provided to Needham youth and their families. Learn more about Youth Services' clinical work at www.needhamma.gov/youth/counseling.

Counseling/Psycho-education Groups: Group counseling/psycho-education was a practical and effective mode of both prevention and treatment and allowed the staff the opportunity to interact with greater numbers of people than individual treatment. Group intervention offered a unique opportunity for young people to learn about issues which affect their peers and to receive feedback from their peers regarding issues such as: divorce, stress, self-esteem, bullying, abuse, depression, social skills, loss, drugs/alcohol, and violence/anger. Of special note was the "Extreme Looks" program, a four-day mind/body/spirit group for teen girls. In FY 2015, 207 hours of group counseling/psycho-education services were provided.

Substance Abuse Awareness Program: Youth Services continued to offer a structured 15-hour Substance Abuse Awareness Program (SAAP) for drug/alcohol-involved youth. This service provided an assessment of current substance use, intervention, education for youth and their families, and counseling services to support healthy choices. All participants and their parents attended an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting to assist in transmitting the message that drugs and alcohol can negatively impact any person without regard to age, gender, or economic status. Learn more about the SAAP Program at www.needhamma.gov/youth/saap.

Picture Perfect: Picture Perfect was a workshop for all 7th graders at Pollard Middle School that investigated the issue of how the media portrays gender roles and appearance, and explored how this can negatively impact how youth feel about themselves. This program was well received and has been in operation for twelve years at the middle school. In FY 2015, over 333 youth participated in this program. Learn more about Picture Perfect at www.needhamma.gov/youth/pictureperfect.

RAY of Hope Program: RAY (**R**ecognize **A** **Y**outh) was established by Needham Youth Services 18 years ago in an effort to acknowledge the outstanding service and positive contributions that young people are making to the Needham community. Working in collaboration with the Needham Business Association, a young person was selected each month as the RAY of Hope recipient and was awarded a certificate from Youth Services and a check from a member of the Needham Business Association. The RAY of Hope program acknowledged youth and their role in making the Needham community a special place to live. Learn more about the RAY of Hope Program at www.needhamma.gov/youth/rayofhope.

Teen Dating Violence Program: Youth Services has provided seminars on Teen Dating Violence for all 9th graders at Needham High School for the past 14 years. These seminars were designed to teach the unique aspects of Teen Dating Violence, how to recognize the warning signs, and ways to access community supports. Participants completed an evaluation of the program itself as well as a survey of their involvement in or knowledge of teen dating violence situations in their lives. Over the past year, over 367 youth were involved in this program. Learn more about the Teen Dating Violence Program at www.needhamma.gov/youth/tdv.

Patrick Forde Good Person Memorial Award: In 2005, Needham resident and community activist Patrick Forde passed away unexpectedly at the age of 51. Patrick was a person who cared deeply about Needham and about youth and families. In an effort to honor Patrick, this award, now in its 9th year, is given annually to a Needham resident who has helped make Needham a better place to live through his/her volunteer work and commitment. This award is recognition that through volunteerism and caring, each person in our community is able to enhance Needham. This year's recipient was Louise Condon, honored for her work with Needham youth and families. Over 100 people attended this year's award ceremony honoring Louise, and to learn more about the Forde Award, visit the Forde Award website at: www.needhamma.gov/youth/fordeaward.

Employment and Volunteer Programs: The Employment Program consisted of two primary services: 1) Youth investigated employment opportunities in local businesses such as offices, restaurants, etc.; and 2) Youth were linked with residents and provided around-the-home support in the form of babysitting, yard-work, snow removal and more; additionally, the Volunteer Resource Listing was maintained to inform youth of area volunteer opportunities. In the past year both business jobs and volunteer opportunities transitioned to an online program, thus youth could access this information on the Youth Services website 24/7 (and this information was updated on a weekly basis). In addition 125 youth were registered in FY 2015 to provide residents with around-the-home support services. Learn more about the Employment Program at www.needhamma.gov/youth/employment and learn more about the Volunteer Program at www.needhamma.gov/youth/volunteerprogram.

Peer Tutor Program: This program matched high school students with middle and elementary school students in need of academic or organizational/study skills assistance. Needham Youth Services' role consisted of outreach to potential participants, training of high school tutors, monitoring weekly tutoring sessions, providing support if problems occurred, and facilitating communication between tutor and participant families. Over the past year, Peer Tutor Program volunteers provided 1302 hours of support to younger students. Learn more about the Peer Tutor Program at www.needhamma.gov/youth/peertutor.

Needham Unplugged: The 14th annual Needham Unplugged was an awareness campaign to remind families and residents to “unplug their electronics” and “plug into” each other. “Unplugged” was a reminder that there is more to life than what is on the other side of a plug. A calendar for the month of March outlined activities that did NOT require electricity and emphasized person-to-person interaction and health. The centerpiece of this year's “unplugged” was the no-homework, no sports, and no meeting night for the Needham Public Schools, and there were no town meetings and virtually no civic, religious, or community meetings took place in Needham. Many area towns such as Newton, Belmont, and Holliston were impressed enough to replicate this program in their community. Other special days included “Phone Free Friday,” “Text Free Tuesday,” and a day of no Social Networking. Special thanks to partners at the Needham Park and Recreation Department and the Charles River YMCA, Needham Board of Selectmen, and to the Needham Public Schools for their support. Learn more about Needham Unplugged at www.needhamma.gov/youth/needhamunplugged.

Graduate/Undergraduate Internship Program: In FY 2015, Needham Youth Services welcomed a clinical intern from the Boston College School of Social Work who provided individual, family, and group counseling services as well as extensive work on the Peer Tutor Program. In addition, the Summer College Internship Program provided support for summer programs as well as essential preparation for fall programs. Over the course of the past year, interns provided 984 hours of free service to the Needham community. Learn more about the Graduate and Undergraduate Internship Programs at www.needhamma.gov/youth/internship.

Make A Statement Day: This program was created and implemented at Needham High School for students and staff nine (9) years ago. Aimed at promoting diversity, acceptance, and understanding by creating an opportunity for students and staff to communicate about issues of importance to them, students and staff created and wore t-shirts with quotes, statistics, and/or statements about meaningful issues in order to raise awareness and have a voice. Now a well established and popular program at the high school, over 800 students and staff participated in this event this past year. Learn more about Make A Statement Day at www.needhamma.gov/youth/masd.

Project VAN (Volunteers Around Needham): VAN offered youth ages 13 to 17 the opportunity to work as part of a team providing valuable community service to non-profit organizations in Needham. Sites included Charles River Center, Needham Park and Recreation Department, Needham Community Council, Needham Public Library, Needham Council on Aging, Needham Housing Authority, Needham Parks and Forestry, and Wingate at Needham. At the conclusion of each program day, participants completed an evaluation of their experience. Project VAN is generously supported by the Needham Community Council. VAN participants provided more than 400 hours of volunteer services over the past summer. Learn more about Project VAN at www.needhamma.gov/youth/projectvan.

Diversion/Restitution Program: In conjunction with the Needham Police Department and the Dedham District Court, Needham Youth Services continued to offer youth who have committed minor violations of the law the opportunity to participate in community service work in lieu of further court action and/or fines. Youth Services' role was to work with offenders and their families to identify the motivations for their behavior, to provide support as required, and to oversee the placement and completion of community service. In the past year, participating youth completed assignments at the Needham Public Library and other town departments. Learn more about the Diversion/Restitution Program on the Youth Services website at www.needhamma.gov/youth/diversion.

Seminars/Workshops/Presentations: Needham Youth Services designed and facilitated numerous trainings in the past year including one for new Needham Public School Staff, Babysitter Training Seminars, the Middle School Parenting Conference presentations at the schools and in the community, and many others. In FY 2015 Needham Youth Services worked with a total of 2,526 youth, parents, and professionals in seminars and/or workshops. For a listing of presentations over the past year, visit the Parent Presentation webpage at www.needhamma.gov/youth/parentpresentations.

Partnerships: In recent years Needham Youth Services has received grants and/or donations from the following organizations: Needham Community Council, Tolman Trust Fund, Rotary Club of Needham Women's Club, Exchange Club of Needham, Middlesex Savings Bank, and many more local businesses, and private citizens. Needham Youth Services devoted considerable time working with the larger community and over the past year collaborated with groups/businesses such as:

- Charles River Center
- Mark's Moving and Storage
- Lisa's Boutique
- Needham Business Association
- Needham Clergy Association
- Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention
- Needham Coalition for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention
- Needham Domestic Violence Action Committee
- Needham Exchange Club
- Needham Housing Authority
- Needham Park and Recreation
- Needham Parks and Forestry
- Needham Public Library
- Needham Public Schools
- Needham Women's Club
- Needham Community Council
- Needham Council on Aging
- Youth Resource Network
- Project Interface
- Regional Center for Healthy Communities
- Riverside Community Care
- Rotary Club of Needham
- School Health Advisory Council
- Wingate at Needham
- YMCA - Charles River Branch

Publications: Needham Youth Services created and/or distributed many original publications in FY 2015 such as those listed below (learn more at www.needhamma.gov/youth/publications).

- Needham Youth Card
- Parent Guide to Teen Parties
- Information on Suicide
- Parenting Literature
- Safe Surf: Internet Safety for Middle School Youth and their Parents